

<b>Editors:</b>	Beate Löffler
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**Review:**

This book combines a perception of the sheer multiplicity, and corresponding specificity of a large number of church buildings in Japan, with an inevitable focus on the relation between their foreignness and their Japanese-ness. Although most Japanese people would regard Christian churches as somehow “foreign” (*fremd*) it is at the same time astounding to realize just how indigenized church architecture has become. So these architectures have also become Japan’s “own” (*eigen*).

To illustrate the point, the same could be said for coffee shops, or cafés, in Japan. They seem western, and are intended so to seem, yet at the same time a Japanese café (the French term is preferred) usually has its own unmistakable features, popular magazines and *manga* for all to read. There is also the offer of “morning service” which in effect means a low price breakfast including a hard-boiled egg to be peeled, a simple salad and an extremely thick piece of slightly toasted, very soft bread, or in other words a Japanese western breakfast. “Japanese western” says it. This is usually available up until ten o’clock, after which time even dreamy students or intellectuals are supposed to wander off to do something more serious.

So this very substantial book deals with a subject which fascinates students of religion as they ponder matters of inculturation, adaption, east-west interactions, and so on. Beate Löffler, highly qualified in architectural studies, has performed a great service to the study of religions by combing the length and breadth of Japan in search of Christian churches of all kinds. The scope is quite ecumenical and includes Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches of various kinds. Some of them are of course, more or less “western” in being neo-Gothic, or better, faintly Gothic in style, or in the case of Orthodox churches, neo-Russian, like the Nikolai-dō in Tokyo. Others however, including some of the historic ones, are distinctly Japanese. Consider for example the Anglican Church of Christ at Nara, which nestles just down the hill from the Buddhist temple Tōfukuji and is so styled that its tiled roofs merge in completely with those of the temple just above. Several of the older churches, from the late nineteenth century, are recognized by civic authorities

as being noteworthy monuments, and consequently attract tourists, mainly Japanese ones. Among the more ambitious works are concrete churches by well-known architects such as Antonin Raymond and Tange Kenzō who was also, though it is not mentioned here, the architect of the stunning headquarters of the major new religion Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō, not far from Hiroshima.

A Christian feature which seems a bit western to Japanese people, is that practically all the churches have at least a small cross at the roof-top, even in the case of the relatively uncommon traditional Japanese tiling. A common Japanese feature, which Löffler has noted well, and photographed, is to be seen in the shelves or little lockers for outdoor shoes. In many, but not all cases, outdoor shoes are removed and the church is entered in stockinged feet or with the indoor slippers provided. Also common, and noticed here too, are the shelves with pigeon holes for the church magazines and circulars of paid-up members. These arise because of a rather distinct concept of church membership. Of course, visitors are always welcomed, but they are very likely to be recognized as such, much more so for example than in some of the larger English churches or Russian Orthodox churches, where no one really knows for sure who the “members” are. These internal features may seem to be more typically Japanese to foreign observers than they do to Japanese people, who simply take them for granted. Such are the subtle tussles between the perceptions of *fremd* and *eigen*. In general, Beate Löffler tends to see more foreignness in external architectural presentations and more of the adapted “own” in the internal shaping and use of space. However this balance is difficult to assess; it might seem to some that so-called “western” architecture in Japan is in fact not really so western after all. Again, the parallel with coffee shops could be instructive. Though obviously not traditional in an old tea-house or a *machiya* mode (and how many Japanese buildings are nowadays?) there is a certain hybridity of style in all urban situations which relates to us that the synthesis of *fremd* and *eigen* has largely been achieved. These are buildings in which both Japanese and foreign persons can feel quite at home: the latter may still be conscious that they are “in Japan” and yet Japanese persons do not really notice that they are “in Japan” for their part. It is simply their normality.

This book is historically ambitious, for the time-scale covered runs from the very beginnings of the renewed Christian missions in the mid nineteenth century (1853) up to the very recent past. Of course, things change all the time, and perhaps it was ill-advised to name the clergy who minister at particular churches, for these are now mostly retired, or have been professionally relocated. But the care for detail is extremely impressive. There are helpful maps, architectural lay-out sketches and astonishingly numerous photographs, some black and white and very many in colour. The main text is in German, but in view of the wealth of reference material, including a gazeteer with over five hundred thumb-nail photographs, the author’s short summaries in English and in Japanese will make this an internationally valuable handbook.

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